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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 001300

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KG](#) [AF](#) [UZ](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ FOREIGN MINISTER PROTESTS "FAILED STATE"

Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Sarbayev called in the Ambassador to complain about the December 16 VOA article that said Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan could be considered "failed states." Sarbayev, armed with a copy of DAS Krol's testimony and a translation of the Q&A, peppered the Ambassador with questions, ultimately asking if it was official U.S. policy to consider Kyrgyzstan a failed state, adding that he "hoped it was not true." The Ambassador explained that VOA had inadvertently mischaracterized what DAS Krol had said in his testimony and that he had not identified any failed states. The Ambassador also raised U.S. concerns about the protection of human rights in several ongoing trials. She pointed out that the trials appeared to be motivated by political considerations. The Ambassador corrected misconceptions on the part of Sarbayev about U.S. policy toward Afghanistan. Sarbayev reiterated Kyrgyzstan's interest in seeing the U.S. successful in Afghanistan and playing a permanent, active role in Central Asia. End Summary.

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¶2. (C) At Foreign Minister Sarbayev's request, the Ambassador met with him on December 18 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss the December 16 Voice of America Russian language article on U.S. policy in Central Asia that indicated that Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan could be considered "failed states." Armed with DAS Krol's official testimony, Sarbayev pointedly asked the Ambassador if it was official U.S. policy to consider Kyrgyzstan a failed state, adding that he "hoped it was not true." After presenting Sarbayev with the VOA retraction and the new correct article, the Ambassador explained to Sarbayev that VOA had inadvertently mischaracterized what DAS Krol had said in his testimony before a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee and that contrary to what the article reported, DAS Krol did not identify any failed states.

¶3. (C) Sarbayev said that the Foreign Ministry had watched the video of Krol's testimony, including the question and answer session, and noted that Krol had said that Kyrgyzstan

was a poor state. While not disputing that Kyrgyzstan was poor, Sarbayev appeared frustrated that DAS Krol had said so publicly. Sarbayev said that President Bakiyev was traveling to Almaty, Kazakhstan this weekend for an informal meeting of Presidents from Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Belarus, Armenia and Turkmenistan, and he was seriously concerned that his President would be asked about Kyrgyzstan's designation as a "failed state." He said that he feared that the Russians would taunt Bakiyev that "after all you have given the Americans recently, they still call you a failed state." An annoyed Sarbayev concluded by complaining that the U.S. criticizes Kyrgyzstan and yet has not made the October payment for the Transit Center.

#### AMBASSADOR PRESSES HUMAN RIGHTS

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¶4. (C) Turning the conversation to U.S. concerns about two high profile trials, one of election-day protesters at Balakchy and the other accusing former Minister of Defense Ismail Isakov of (fairly petty) misuse of government resources, the Ambassador pressed hard that the trials appeared to be motivated by political considerations. The Ambassador said that such trials, especially if they result in severe prison sentences, will hinder efforts to broaden and strengthen U.S.-Kyrgyz relations and could be raised at the Annual Bilateral Consultations. A calmer Sarbayev said that the Government of Kyrgyzstan will be prepared to discuss all aspects of the U.S.-Kyrgyzstan relationship at the ABCs, including human rights and the referenced trials, asserting

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that General Isakov had abused his power while at the Ministry of Defense.

¶5. (C) Sarbayev briefed the Ambassador on the upcoming meeting of Presidents in Kazakhstan and on a planned meeting in the new year between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek. Sarbayev said that the Government of Kyrgyzstan wanted to discuss many issues with its neighbors, including migrant workers, the border, and economic cooperation. The main goal of the meetings, according to Sarbayev, was to discuss regional stability. Sarbayev noted that the first U.S. Annual Bilateral Consultations in the region will be with Uzbekistan; where the human rights discussion will likely be difficult.

#### AFGHANISTAN WORRIES

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¶6. (C) Sarbayev described the concerns about U.S. Afghan policy voiced by diplomatic colleagues at the OSCE Foreign Minister meeting in Athens and expressed his own concern about the U.S. commitment to success in Afghanistan. Sarbayev said that he had found his colleagues at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting to be quite concerned about the implications of the December 1 speech by President Obama. In particular, the French and Bulgarian Foreign Ministers had evinced no understanding of or confidence in U.S. policy in their meetings with him. He reported that French FM Bernard Kouchner had said, "I don't know what the U.S. is trying to do in Afghanistan. How can we implement a policy we don't understand?" Sarbayev went on to note that the Russians also appear to be concerned that the U.S. is not committed to victory in Afghanistan.

¶7. (C) From the perspective of Kyrgyzstan, Sarbayev said it is very concerning that the U.S. has set a deadline for exiting Afghanistan. The threat of the Taliban had driven Central Asia into the arms of the Russians and Chinese in 2001 with the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. If the U.S. were to withdraw from the region the Central Asians would have no choice, once again.

¶8. (C) The Ambassador pointed out to Sarbayev that the U.S. has not set a deadline for withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Rather, President Obama had given a date on which we would begin to move troops home, conditioning the speed at which troops could leave to conditions on the ground. She highlighted the priority of resolving the Afghan situation for the USG and the Obama Administration, specifically. The increase in troop levels would help create the conditions for their return home. It became clear in the ensuing discussion that Sarbayev had misunderstood the speech, believing that it set a deadline for a full withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Ambassador clarified the policy for him.

¶9. (C) Sarbayev reiterated Kyrgyzstan's interest in seeing the U.S. successful in Afghanistan and in continuing to build a strong bilateral relationship with the U.S. Kyrgyzstan would like to see the U.S. play a permanent and active role in Central Asia. He said it was important that Kyrgyz citizens see concrete benefits from Kyrgyz-U.S. cooperation. In that regard, he expressed concern about the contracting of transportation for the Northern Defense Network (NDN) route passing through Kyrgyzstan. He said that he had received reports that the first two shipments had been received in Kabul and that they had been transported by Tajik companies. He hoped, he said, that Kyrgyz companies would also receive sub-contracts for transportation of goods on the NDN so that the benefits of our cooperation would be made clearer to the population.

#### PRESS COVERAGE AND INTERNET DISCUSSION

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¶10. (C) The VOA article has been picked up by some local media which have mostly re-printed the VOA article and the most popular online chat forum in Kyrgyzstan has had a vibrant discussion about Kyrgyzstan as a "failed state."

¶11. (C) Comment: The retraction by VOA will help this issue to dissipate. This episode serves to highlight the hypersensitivity of the Kyrgyz Government to public criticism, even where that criticism is only implied and fully justified. However, if carefully managed, that hypersensitivity is something we may be able to use to our own benefit in some cases.

GFOELLER